

## **Transboundary Monitoring Task Group (TMTG) – Meeting Summary**

October 31, 2019

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### **Meeting Objective:**

Re-convene after the summer break; debrief on 2019's monitoring; and discuss long-term issues

### **Attendees:**

- B.C. ENV: Doug Hill (co-chair); Lisa Paquin; Patrick Williston; Michel Ryan-Aylward
- MT DEQ: Myla Kelly (co-chair); Darrin Kron
- Teck: Carla Fraser; Meera Bawa; Maria Arnold
- US ACE: Greg Hoffman
- MT FWP: Trevor Selch
- US EPA: Ayn Schmit; Jason Gildea, Patricia McGrath

### **Meeting Summary:**

The meeting began with a debrief on 2019 monitoring activities, led by Carla Fraser (Teck) and supported by Greg Hoffman (US ACE). Prior to the meeting Teck circulated an updated version of their 2019 sampling plan (see Appendix 1), which Carla walked through. Please see the appended sampling plan for full details, highlights include the following:

- Teck and US ACE encountered some challenges early in the 2019 monitoring associated with staffing changes at Teck and clarifying logistics. As a result there was a small delay in getting underway but the issues have been resolved and otherwise 2019 sampling went smoothly.
- Particulate sampling is completed and analysis of September samples is underway and expected to be ready within a month. Carla flagged that a bullet for particulate selenium samples which indicated timing for when US ACE would upload the data should have been removed; this has been corrected in the appendix version. US ACE has received the first and second round of samples and Kent Easthouse (US ACE) will provide an update about those at the November face-to-face meeting of the Lake Koocanusa Monitoring and Research Working Group (LKMRWG).
- Teck was unable to collect samples of surface macroinvertebrates in May. They tried again on two more occasions over a large area without success but were able to successfully gather samples in September. Data for those samples is coming in. Carla expressed appreciation for MT DEQ lending Teck their net for this sampling, which enabled Teck's efforts to align with Montana's QAPPs.
- Data spreadsheet for fish samples from May recently arrived and will be circulated as well as posted to the wiki. September data is currently being analyzed, and will hopefully be ready in time for the November face to face meetings. There was a good range of species collected and only one fish that may have been over the EPA guideline with the majority of samples being well below.
  - Teck asked for clarification around which site the data should be uploaded to. There was agreement that the WQX Portal is most appropriate. Teck will begin the process to make the data available on WQX, but it may not be ready in time for the November face to face. The raw data will be shared in advance of that meeting.

- Carla noted that samples for ovaries are collected consistent with when a species spawn or are expected to have riper ovaries so there will be different collection times for different species. For example, when reviewing the data you will see no ovary data for Whitefish and Kokanee from the summer, but it will be included in the September data.
- Greg Hoffman (US ACE) confirmed the samples for large volume zooplankton have been completed and shipped for analysis along with chemistry information for anions, cations and total metals, which Kent Easthouse will speak to at the LKMRWG face to face meeting in November.
- Teck will share the raw data soon including information from both the Canadian and U.S. portions of the reservoir.
- Questions regarding the 2019 monitoring debrief:
  - Jason Gildea (US EPA) asked whether Teck's face to face presentation will speak to both Canadian and U.S. data.
    - Carla confirmed that Teck will speak to all data captured in the reservoir that is consistent with Canadian data and this will also be the case going forward for Teck's annual reports.
  - Trevor Selch (MT FWP) asked whether Teck intends to coordinate with MT FWP crews again in 2020 for fish sampling.
    - Carla confirmed that is the plan.

The next agenda item was exploring whether any changes would be needed for 2020 sampling in light of the 2019 activities.

- Greg Hoffman noted that his colleague Kent may have additional thoughts on the question, but Greg did not see a need for any changes. He also noted that in 2019 the reservoir water levels were unusually high and hopefully next year will be back to normal levels.
- Carla noted Teck will attempt surface tows in May 2020 but, similar to 2019, will do subsequent tests and sampling if those samples cannot be obtained.
- There was general agreement that the 2019 sampling plans will carry forward for 2020 sampling with no changes.

The group then addressed the list of long-term issues previously identified by members:

#### Data entry

- There was agreement that data from the 2019 and 2020 monitoring activities would be uploaded by Teck to the WQX Portal.
- Teck confirmed they've uploaded water data already and it went smoothly. Tissue data has yet to be uploaded and may take some time, but Teck staff have contacts at WQX who are being very helpful. Once the 2019 is prepared it will be easier to upload subsequent data sets.

#### Data Management Activities

- Ayn Schmit (US EPA) flagged that once data upload and availability is sorted (per the previous discussion item) there remains the question of data analysis and communicating findings. Interested parties, including members of the LKMRWG, will likely have

questions about what the data tells us, and the Task Group should have responses prepared.

- Myla Kelly (MT DEQ, Task Group co-chair) noted her predecessor Eric Urban carried this conversation in previous meetings and asked to clarify whether there were any commitments made with respect to an annual summary. Michel Ryan-Aylward (ENV) confirmed no such commitments were contemplated.
- Carla explained Teck's current reporting requirements, which are to report every three years on the regional aquatic effects monitoring program which includes detailed reporting for Koocanusa Reservoir. Teck includes applicable U.S. data in those reports as long as the data is consistent with the methods Teck uses and questions that Teck is trying to answer. In addition Teck prepares annual summary reports of data and monitoring that have occurred, which are only summaries of activities not interpretive reports. The annual summary reports are delivered to the LKMRWG's Monitoring and Research Committee (MRC). Carla noted some of the data being collected does not address the questions Teck is trying to answer and therefore is not included in Teck's reporting.
- Ayn commented that the activities of this Task Group represent a success story that should be shared but if reporting of the Task Group's activities is simply rolled into existing reporting channels the success story may get lost. She suggested the Task Group prepare a high level report that identifies the Task Group's monitoring activities without touching on analysis or findings.
- Doug Hill (ENV, Task Group co-chair) noted that B.C. and Alaska did a similar report on monitoring activities which could serve as an example. He committed to sharing that report with Michel for distribution to Task Group members for review and consideration (see Appendix 2).
- Myla noted that if such a report is distributed we will likely receive questions about results and will need to consider how to respond.
- Ayn agreed and suggested that in addition to a near-term summary of monitoring activities, as discussed above, the Task Group could also consider a concluding report at the end of the project with basic analysis such as comparison to established thresholds.
- Michel noted that Teck will be speaking to some of the data at the MRC face to face meeting in November and asked whether that is sufficient for near-term reporting?
- Darrin Kron (MT DEQ) suggested seeing how LKMRWG members respond in November and deciding on next steps in light of their reaction.
- Doug suggested that it would be consistent with the TMTG's project charter to ask the LKMRWG's Steering Committee whether supplemental reporting is needed.
  - Myla committed to finding some time on the MRC portion of the face to face agenda for Doug to speak to this.

#### Sampling downstream of Libby Dam

- Trevor began by noting that downstream monitoring may not be within the scope of the TMTG but felt it's something the group should discuss.
- Trevor noted the recent USGS/EPA Kootenai River monitoring results which indicated elevated concentrations of selenium in some mountain whitefish. He noted it was unusual because other concentrations were fairly low and the source of the elevated selenium levels is uncertain. Could be from the mainstem Kootenai or a tributary and there are data

gaps. The USGS/EPA monitoring looked only at fall spawning fish, and there may be interest in looking at spring sampling as a result.

- Ayn flagged that the US EPA is concerned about the results of that study and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI) had asked the EPA as part of participation in this Task Group to advocate for the inclusion of downstream sampling. In the past the EPA's response was that because there wasn't any data indicating impacts of concern and the TMTG was an entirely new transboundary initiative, EPA was not prepared to advocate for downstream sampling. However, these new results change that position. EPA is trying to identify sources of funding for additional work in the U.S. with spring spawning fish as the target. The EPA is increasingly seeing a need for a more comprehensive monitoring strategy and coordination and collaboration. That view is also supported by the U.S. interagency transboundary mining work group. Further discussion with Canadian counterparts is needed.
- Doug agreed that if there was to be more sampling beyond Koocanusa Reservoir it should be part of a more comprehensive strategy. He noted that the TMTG was put together for a specific task. Proposals to expand beyond 2020 or geographic scope of the reservoir should go to the Steering Committee for consideration. Doug flagged that B.C. is also interested in downstream effects because the river flows back into Canada at Creston and Kootenay Lake which is a huge fishery resource. Doug also flagged another working group called IKERT (the International Kootenai Ecosystem Restoration Team) that includes some members of the TMTG as something to consider in a broader conversation around transboundary monitoring beyond the TMTG.
- Ayn noted that in the absence of an agreement for the LKMRWG and given that group's focus on selenium it is not a good fit for broader scoped transboundary monitoring. Ayn encouraged TMTG members to continue discussing broader monitoring while acknowledging a need for broader conversations on the issue.
- Darrin noted that MT DEQ is also concerned about the recent USGS/EPA results and supports moving forward to continue investigating those results. But recognized the TMTG may not be the avenue to do so.
- Trevor agreed that it makes sense to pursue broader monitoring as part of something comprehensive rather than an add-on to the TMTG.
- Greg noted that he is involved with IKERT and that it is focused on white sturgeon recovery with regional scope. Greg encouraged members of the TMTG to consider expanding the scope of transboundary monitoring whether through this group or elsewhere.
- Myla suggested that the results of the TMTG's efforts should help inform decisions and discussions around further monitoring.
- Jason asked Doug to clarify whether ENV had any specific proposals in mind.
  - Doug indicated nothing specific at this time, only that the TMTG is not the appropriate venue to decide on undertaking additional downstream monitoring.

Michel cut discussion off at this point due to the meeting running over time. He committed to circulating a summary of the meeting along with a copy of the previously discussed BC-AK summary of monitoring activities; and to circulate a doodle poll for the next TMTG meeting targeting December.

**Action Items:**

- Michel distribute BC-AK document as example for potential summary report (Field Report – Alaska Monitoring and Assessment Program, 2019 Southeast Streams Survey)
- Michel distribute summary of Oct 31 TMTG meeting
- ALL review the BC-AK document; consider whether the TMTG should prepare a similar report
- MRC co-chairs find time on MRC Face to Face agenda for Doug Hill to speak to TMTG progress (max 30 mins) (COMPLETED)
- Michel create doodle for December meeting (REVISED POST-MEETING TO JANUARY DOODLE)

**Next Meeting:**

- Michel to schedule teleconference for December 2019 (Revised to January)

**Appendices:**

1. Updated 2019 Sampling Plan
2. Field Report – Alaska Monitoring and Assessment Program, 2019 Southeast Streams Survey